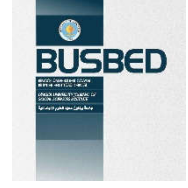


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GÖLGEDEKİ TABAKA VE AYYAŞLIK YA DA POLONYALI HİZMETÇİLERİN YÜZYILLAR BOYUNCA ALKOLLE TEMAS KURMA DURUMLARI

Maciej LASKOWSKI¹

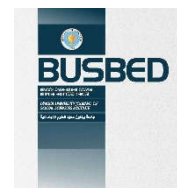
ÖZ

Son zamanlarda, Polonya'da, kültürel miras bağlamında alkole düşkünlük konusundan, kültürü geniş anlamıyla ele alan çoğu bilim insanı uzak durmaktadır. Ayrıca, diğer uluslara benzer şekilde, aşırı alkol tüketimi, geniş kapsamlı sosyal yansımalarıyla Polonya toplumunun hayati, belki de ayrılmaz bir parçasını oluşturmuştur ve bu durum hala devam etmektedir. Tarihsel ve edebi kayıtlar, Polonya soylularının içki içme alışkanlıklarına biraz ışık tutarken, onların gölgede kalmış hizmetkarlarınınkiyle çok daha az ilgilenilmektedir. Hizmetçilerin, özellikle ev hizmetlilerinin ve efendilerin sıkı sıkıya bağlı olmaları nedeniyle, bir dizi hükümdar da dahil olmak üzere, toplumun ikinci tabakasının alkolik eğilimleri bu çalışmada kendisine yer bulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Polonyalı hizmetçiler, Alkolik düşkünlük, Ölçsüzlük, Ayyaşlık, İçki alışkanlıkları, Gölgedeki tabaka

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THE CONDUCT OF POLISH SERVANTS IN CONTACT WITH ALCOHOL ACROSS THE CENTURIES IN APPLIED LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

In modern times in Poland the issue of alcoholic indulgence in the context of cultural heritage seems to be shunned by most scholars dealing with culture in its broad sense. However, similarly to other nations, excessive consumption of alcohol constituted, and still does, a vital, perhaps inseparable, part of Polish society with its wide-ranging social repercussions. Whereas historical and literary records throw some light on the drinking behaviours of the Polish nobility, those of their servants, who were as if in the shadow of their masters, are tackled to a much lesser degree. The main interest of the ensuing article thereupon lies in examining the conduct and propensities of the household help in this respect in Poland across the centuries in applied literature. Due to the fact that the servant (particularly domestics) and the master were strictly bound together, a sketch of the alcoholic inclinations of the latter stratum of society, including a selection of monarchs, has found its place in the study as well.

Keywords: Polish servants, Alcoholic indulgence, Immoderation, Insobriety, Drinking behaviour, Applied literature

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following work centres around the characteristics of servants (mainly house servants) working for their lords in Poland-Lithuania in the context of alcohol consumption. More concretely, it depicts the servants' behaviours and reactions when on duty at the manor, notably during the masters' banquet time, and beyond its premises. In all cases, the paper attempts to disclose the aforementioned aspects connected with servants when they ought not to indulge themselves in the pleasures of alcohol. Notwithstanding this, studying the living of domestics tells the reader a lot about their masters, because their existence was hardly extricable (Kitowicz 1841: 106). For this reason and for the purpose of contextualising the analysed subject, the drinking customs and mentality of Polish nobles (Pol. szlachta), together with a number of kings, have as well been sketched. The discussion embraces the period from the end of the 16th to the end of the 18th centuries, which roughly stays in accordance with the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Yet, earlier and later dates do appear in the text whenever necessary.

With a view to materialise the foregoing commitments into actions, the methodology of the article is based on analysing examples of applied literature that relate to the theme under study. More specifically, the analysed texts consist of diaries, memoirs and correspondence that deal with the alcohol drinking behaviour of Polish servants throughout the centuries. The choice of the above-mentioned primary sources used for the analysis results from the assumption that, apart from purely historical facts, in order to present opinions on a nation's given facet (in this case servants' excessive drinking), it is also necessary to present the situation from the perspective of a particular person, i.e. of a writer of applied literature who at the same time is a witness of the events described. Subjective and imprecise as such descriptions may be, such perceptions are invaluable for understanding the mentality, as well as the cultural and psychological predisposition to drunkenness of the people described (Besala 2015: 10). In order to minimise the erroneousness that may come along with such an approach, next to the author's criticism of the analysed material, the study contains scholars' opinions voiced not only in present-day sources, but also in some which are centuries old. Moreover, dealing specifically with servants is motivated by the conclusion that in Polish historiography so far sporadic attention has been bestowed on this very rung of the social ladder, principally in terms of their drinking. Still, the scope of this article does not allow thorough handling other worthy facets connected with retainers such as their categories, everyday life or how this institution altered over time. Also, the discourse does not differentiate between the terms "Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth" and "Poland" and between the demeanour and performance of servants from the Polish and the Lithuanian parts of the Commonwealth. *Opis Obyczajów i Zwyczajów za Panowania Augusta III* [The Description of Customs and Practices during the Reign of Augustus III] written by Jędrzej Kitowicz (1728-1804) was the most cardinal primary source for the lecture; from the secondary ones Besala's *Alkoholowe Dzieje Polski* [Alcoholic History of Poland] proved essential.

2. THE EXAMPLE COMES FROM THE TOP

To state from the historical point of view that the story of drinking alcohol in Poland is the story of the Polish nobility's drinking only would be to take too terrible a liberty. In fact, members of all classes drank throughout centuries and even millennia (Abramowicz et al. 2018: 7-8). Alcohol became part and parcel not only for many Poland's kings (and rulers of its parts in the pre-monarchical period), magnates, churchmen, middle and lesser nobles, but for the middle class and peasants too. Although the Jewish, who had been settling in Poland on a bigger scale since the Statuty Kaliskie, in general abstained from alcohol, they also drank and were even obligated to do so, for example as part of the religious holiday called Purim (Besala 2015: 779). However much (or little) the given echelons of Polish society were drunken, behavioural patterns trickled down from the top, inclusive of the approach to alcohol (Gloger 1972: 368).

In the Roman era, the tribal aristocracy in the lands that today make Poland for certain drank beer. Mead and wine are also likely to have found their way onto the table (Besala 2015: 16), which during Mieszko I's times was initially so low that feasters sat on animals' skin. It is speculative whether the subjects of Poland's first ruler drank moderately or wildly, the way their Germanic neighbours did, after which they became aggressive. What is well documented by chronicle writers is that Slavs were extraordinarily hospitable and generous centuries before the official beginning of Poland and well afterwards (Besala 2015: 17-18). What is also known is that Mieszko I's son, Bolesław Chrobry, who was the first king of Poland, was an avid beer lover, which among Germans earned him the nickname *Trink-bier* (Gloger 1972: 28). Moving on to the next century, it is worth relating a popular anecdote of Leszek Biały (Leszek the White) (1186-1227) – one of the Polish high dukes from the times of the realm's fragmentation. According to the famous Polish chronicler Jan Długosz (1415-1480), Leszek Biały excused himself to the pope from not peregrinating to the Holy Land, because he tolerated only beer and mead, which in Palestine was nowhere to be found... (Brückner 1939: 729). Jerzy Besala (2015: 32) infers that in the Poland of the High Middle Ages, the aristocracy, similarly to townsmen, drank at least two litres of beer daily, which may not sound a lot, but after years of regular drinking it did not prevent some rulers "from falling into the trap of becoming addicted, with all the consequences for psychical and physical wellbeing". Yet, peculiarly enough, at

times it saved lives; ad exemplum, during the Hussite Wars (1419-1434) the town of Bolesławiec was approached by the Hussites but liberated through an offer of a beer barrel made to the attackers by the town's councilmen. In a battle of Śląsk (Silesia) in 1469 this bargaining chip was used again to rescue this town, and with the same effect (Długosz 1975: 242-243 after Besala 2015: 33). Beer and mead remained the staple alcohols in Poland well into the 17th century (Leśniak 2016: 295); nevertheless, during the Jagiellonian dynasty wine accompanied the elite, earlier appearing on rare occasions. This beverage, widely relished by Italians, was largely popularised in Poland by Bona Sforza (1494-1557), the second wife of Zygmunt I Stary (Sigismund I the Old) (reigned 1507-1548). The royal couple's novum in terms of drinking and eating was cutting down the time of szlachta's daily feasting at the table to one hour from the heretofore up to eight... (Besala 2015: 90-91).

Both beer and wine were favoured by the greatest Polish Renaissance poets, which emanates from their oeuvre. Jan Kochanowski (1916: 32), for instance, wrote:

Znał kto kiedy poetę trzeźwego?

Nie uczyni taki nic dobrego.

This can be translated as:

Has anyone ever known a sober poet?

He won't render any good.

It ought not to escape attention, however, that earlier in the poem this outstanding humanist calls for unity or oneness. For Kochanowski, it is at the table where such an occasion arises:

Przywileje powieśmy na kołku,

A ty wedle pana siądz, pachółku.

Let us throw away privileges,

And you, servant, sit next to the lord.

Not surprisingly, the most frequent application of beer, mead, wine, and gorzałka – since the 18th century called wódka (vodka) – was while banqueting. The following vivid illustration of the szlachta's lack of alcoholic self-control reflects the mode of drinking in the 16th through the 18th centuries (as opposed to the Middle Ages during which "Poland was never drunk" (Brückner 1939: 729)). Imitating the style of Germans, the Polish highborn drank to health, after which they violently shattered mugs on their own heads (Brückner 1939: 730). First, the banqueters drank to the wellness of the fatherland, then the health of the monarch, the primate or bishop, and then those the highest in rank (Gloger 1972: 367). Toasts were drunk standing, but they occurred so frequently that once the party stood up, it was no use returning to the seats (Bystroń 1933:175). Omitting rounds of alcohol equalled treason (Gloger 1972: 251). Once completely intoxicated, any pretext could make the drinkers reach for their sabres and the one-minute-ago friend became a deadly enemy. Not seldom were fingers and noses cut off, teeth knocked out, bodies strewn on the floor, in which configuration dogs could lick the master's numb face (Brückner 1939: 731-732). The bigger the chaos and confusion, the gladder the host, inferred the Polish historian and diarist Jędrzej Kitowicz (1841: 187). Receptions ended with the toast kochajmy się – "let us love one another" – for the one-minute-ago enemy was again the best friend. Even though the guests were now outside, they still had to absorb alcohol. Finding himself on the horse, the noble had to drink one more time, and this moral duty gave rise to the last sip of alcohol of the party – the Polish strzemienne, whose translation may be a "stirrup shot", since it took place when the celebrator, already positioned on his horse, had his feet in the stirrups (Gloger 1972: 367; 288).

This "sick hospitality" – a term proposed by Besala (2015: 860), because while drinking madly many corrupt nobles carried out politics at the regional and national level – lessened to an extent during King Stanisław August Poniatowski's reign (1764-1795), when the monarch himself, among others, set the example (Besala 2015: 861). Of course, it does not mean that there were no more sots in late 18th-century Poland such as Stanisław Jan

Iliński, who drank eighteen bottles of wine and around three litres of vodka on daily(!) basis, recites the diarist Jan Duklan Ochocki (1857: 58), contemporary with Iliński.

3. JAKI PAN BYWA, TAKA I CZELADKA – LIKE MASTER, LIKE SERVANT

In the face of the ruling classes' drinking leanings and conduct, of which the above lines are only a sample, the question arises why would servants, especially domestics, want to keep away from alcohol, all the more that they customarily assisted their lords and were thus immersed in the atmosphere of (binge) drinking.

As noted in the introduction, this article does not delve into the typology of servants, with their inner hierarchy, for example. Also, following observations of Kitowicz (1841: 110; 115), it must be stressed that what was true about servants in one manor (i.e. their duties, rules, customs, rights, treatment by the lord, etc.) could be different in another. Out of necessity, therefore, the following sketch presents the most frequent behaviours, tendencies, and "the general atmosphere" with servants as the main characters. Nonetheless, for the demonstration of the scale and variety of the "system of servants", which showed the status of the lord, a number of specific kinds of servants will be mentioned. The description below concerns the retinue (Pol. *świta*) of the 17th-century Hetman Stanisław Lubomirski of Wiśnicz, but it might largely be applied to other lords as well as the previous and subsequent periods.

[He – ML] retained two Marshals, two chaplains, four secretaries, four sewers (Pol. *krajczy*), twenty chamberlains (Pol. *szambelani*), and sixty senior clients. In addition, there would have been a swarm of candidate clients (Pol. *aplikanty*), seneschals (Pol. *komorniki*), resident advisers (Pol. *rezydenci*), treasurers (Pol. *podskarbi*), ostlers (Pol. *stajenni*), masters-of-ropes (Pol. *szatni*), masters-of-horse (Pol. *koniuszcy*), pages (Pol. *pokojowi*), messengers, military captains (Pol. *rotmistrzowie*), and, of course, a similar array of ladies-in-waiting (Pol. *damy dworu*) to serve in the female quarters. The non-noble personnel included the court physician, the surgeon, the artist, the ballet-master, the pastrycook, the gardener, the engineer, the architect, and the director of music (Davies 2005: 175-176; 1998: 256-257).

Typical of the following century was also the post of the general manager (Pol. *zarządca*), who was accountable for economic and technical dealings of the property (Mączak 2003: 193). Then, there were plenty of cooks, turnkeys (Pol. *odźwierni*), carters (Pol. *woźnice*), carpenters, butlers, cellarers (Pol. *piwniczn*), and domestics (Pol. *szłużba domowa*). Singular as it may sound, many men of means also kept jesters, foreigners, dwarfs, and historians. "The Tartar custom of carrying off human yasir into slavery was matched by the Polish custom of holding Tartar or Negro prisoners as personal slaves" (Davies 2005: 176; 1998: 257). If the number of duties is looked at as a whole, then it is not surprising that the Polish word *śługa* (servant) derives from "hard work" (Brückner 1927: 502). In the Polish reality a servant's life often meant "hard life", notably when the upper crust, repeatedly under an influence of alcohol, treated their helpers as their own commercial commodity. Besala (2015: 822) bluntly informs the reader that the drinking, litigious *szlachta* vented their alcoholic frustration on retainers through beating them. Brückner (1931: 272-273) adds that the numerous employees serving their lords were often hungry, with no payment for their service, and they slept on the floor. All the predicament situated them at the lowest rungs of the Polish social ladder (Korczak 2008: 86). Notwithstanding this, as a French-Polish cartographer, engineer and architect Beauplan (c. 1600-1673) wrote, the servants had a way to revenge their humiliation: when the lord and his guests were already very drunk, the domestics emptied "ten times more bottles than all the guests" and started amazingly brutish, noisy, and obscene frolic. For example, the Polish author of memoirs Jan Chryzostom Pasek (c. 1636-1701) describes a drunken brawl in which he knocked down his noble opponents, after which he continued drinking with his servants joined in turn by those of Pasek's adversaries. Together, they put pieces of paper in the noses of the overwhelmed, unaware nobles and set fire to the paper. Next, "they smeared their moustaches with some things" (Pasek 1929: 196). Beauplan (1822: 405) mentions that sometimes servants wiped away dirty plates with the sleeves of the *kontusz* of the unaware owners. Also, after the masters and guests had finished a dish, the domestics were allowed to "devour" scraps from their plates (Beauplan 1822: 404), but now and then a dish intended for guests had disappeared before it reached the table. Such misdemeanour was ordinarily let off (Bystron 1933: 172-173), but there were houses where it equalled the loss of a monthly payment (Kitowicz 1841: 120). Stealing festivity members' food did not seem as outrageous as robbing them of their belongings like silver cutlery, which, as Bystron (1933: 172) remarks, was "not rarely" committed by members of the affluent spheres too. At times, it was the "blue-blooded" from whom servants obtained costly things due to the alcoholic immoderation of the former. Brückner (1939: 731) conjures up a noble who was very mean when sober but who gave out valuables to "anyone who believed in God" once he tasted alcohol.

Commonly, servants were indolent and clumsy (Bystron 1933: 167-168). Drunken indeed, they stood behind the celebrators in readiness for waiting on them (Besala 2015: 815). Sometimes, however, when a noble had already lost power in his legs but wanted to drink when toasts were made, two servants were to lift him up and support him so that he could stand and continue to drink with the others. Actually, the urge to absorb alcohol was so relentless that at a celebratory meal the *szlachta* kept shouting to one of the retainers *nalej!* (pour). The result was

that a German visitor was convinced that *nalej* was the servant's name, and he addressed him *Lieber Nalej* (Brückner 1939: 731; 733). But even if a banqueter had wished to omit a round and spill alcohol on the floor (secretly – not to be seen as a traitor), it would rather have come to a naught, as servants whose duty was to fill up the cup were stationed not only around but also under the table (Kitowicz 1841: 184). Still, a desperate but cunning noble who now converted to teetotalism, seeing that the party were in a stupor and inattentive, would cause a servant to drink on his (the noble's) behalf, hoping no one would detect the shameful trick (Kitowicz 1841: 186). Now, if noblemen wrought havoc with their "sick hospitality", no wonder that servants' drinking "ten times more", as aforesaid, even before the lords (Bystroń 1933: 172) "and even faster than their lords" (Brückner 1939: 732-733) added to the witnesses' impression of a battlefield when they referred to parties.

If it happened that servants' conduct was part of a perfect pandemonium at the manor, how then did the situation look when they were on duty away? Curiously, not only did they often become intoxicated "legally", but also, even more surprisingly, they did so at the master's initiative and cost. Bystroń (1933: 178) holds the view that so it occurred that servants, paradoxically, were forced to drink! The logic behind this mindset was that drunk and as a consequence more aggressive servants would stand up to their employer's potential enemy and his (drunk) helpers more eagerly or, on the contrary, provoke a fight (Besala 2015: 531). Furthermore, the Polish 17th-century luminary Szymon Starowolski (1859: 77) wrote that since the *szlachta* knew a festivity would end up in a drunken revelry, if invited, they and their servants in fact armed up themselves as if they had gone to war. As a result, it happened that the servants took part in brawls, too (Ferenc 2008: 161). What is more, if they afforded it, the *szlachta* would bring with them as many retainers as they could. The anticipation of violence, either as defenders or attackers, was one thing; the need to display one's wealth imitating magnates (Pol. *magnateria*) was another (Besala 2015: 531). "A *szlachcic* in Poland keeps more servants than a baron in Germany", complained Stanisław Staszic (1790: 50) nearly 150 years after Starowolski's statement. In turn, James Harris (1746-1820), the Earl of Malmesbury and the British Minister to Prussia and Ambassador to Russia, estimated and recorded in his diary that Prince Czartoryski's personal attendants and servants totaled 375 (Harris 1844: 26).

The effect of big numbers of servants in combination with big amounts of alcohol and the expectation of physical violence and commotion generated strife and life was at risk. However, there were other turbulences different to fights resulting from frivolous alcoholic pleasure-seeking of the lord's employees. Coach drivers, for example, were notorious for drinking while awaiting their masters, who were engaged in consuming alcohol in a tavern. Because they were not sent home and the masters' partying time was long, the coachmen had to wait for hours and in cold at times. Their creativity and insubordination led them to a place where they were able to enjoy alcohol, the outcome of which was that the "finally-ready-to-go-home" noble could not find his coachman... (Zawadzki 1963: 489-490 after Besala 2015: 800). Another sample of servants' indiscipline and recklessness comes from the diarist Marcin Matuszewicz (1714-1773), who sets forth disturbances that took place during his brother's wedding reception. On the third day of the celebration a cook known for drinking stuck a candle to a coach's wheel. The fire consumed the whole tavern, two coaches, two carts and other precious objects. The stress stemming from the incident was relieved through alcohol. "On that third day", wrote the diarist, "I drank heavily" (Matuszewicz 1986: 426-427 after Besala 2015: 656). There is every sign to surmise that fires started by drunken retainers were not a rarity, for they happened even at the near-royal level. Maciej Vorbek-Lettow (1593-1663), the doctor of King Władysław IV Waza (Vasa) (reigned 1632-1648), in his diary elucidates a mishap in which drunken servants accidentally set fire to the inn where the doctor's wife dwelt. Only a narrow escape saved the woman from death (Vorbek-Lettow 1978: 126 after Besala 2015: 531).

The patterns of such reckless behaviour and excesses of drunken servants started to alter only toward the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Owing to trends flowing from France, eagerly followed by King Stanisław August Poniatowski, moderation was welcome at the table. Besides, servants were no longer allowed to enter the banquet hall; this role was taken over by butlers (Besala 2015: 861; 815).

4. CONCLUSION

One general and inescapable inference of the research is that intellectuals paint the drinking behaviours and inclinations of servants in Poland in dismal colours. Observers from this country and other parts of Europe, both from the period in question and later ones, notice that the (domestic) help as if competed with their employers in alcoholic degradation. Obviously, a scientific approach to the revelations of diarists and other eyewitnesses (concerning the aspects portrayed in this article but in others too) require careful judgement. It ought not be overlooked that authors contemporary with those depicted were attracted to the most vivid, boisterous, and extreme conduct of servants. Moreover, some of the writers, staunch moralists for instance, may have exaggerated the behaviours' extravagance in order to discredit those who – in their understanding – drank extensively. Perhaps others sought sensational accounts to impress their readership. Still others could have been prejudiced against this group of people or Poland as a whole. Nonetheless, even when estimated very cautiously, it can be concluded that retainers did not abstain from uncontrolled, binge drinking, to put it gently. One reason why it can be stated so is

that some patterns of conduct, such as servants' drinking whenever the lord was out of sight, were described by writers repeatedly and in a similar way. Besides, present-day academics, equipped with more scientific knowledge and thus a broader picture of the problem under study, also imply that alcohol was ubiquitous in servants' life regardless of whether on or off duty, which engineered a hazard to the life of the servants themselves as well as anybody around.

Another conclusive reflection is that one of the motives for servants' strong alcoholic self-persuasion was the fact that the szlachta did not restrain from unrestrained drinking either and to a substantial extent they set the negative pattern of feasting for their domestics. The latter would, with all likelihood, have drunk anyway, but the flamboyant, uncouth, degenerative style and unthinkably careless drinking mentality did come largely from the top, the traces of which, one might risk saying, can be perceived also today.

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